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ADVOCATE OF PEACE.

MAY, 1843.

CLAIMS OF PEACE ON LITERARY MEN.—No. 2.

Glance at the mental effects of war. Its iron-handed sway over the minds as well as the bodies of its minions, must give the cause of peace peculiar claims upon intellectual men who demand freedom of thought, speech and action for the full development of their powers, and the proper extension of their influence. The mental despotism of war is the worst form of oppression on earth, and stands unrivalled except by the Inquisition at the zenith of its power. It allows the soldier neither liberty of speech, nor freedom of inquiry, nor the safe, unshackled exercise of his own conscience; but turns him into a mere wheel in the vast machinery of war, and forbids his moving beyond his prescribed sphere in the work of carnage and devastation. It well nigh annihilates all individuality of mind and character. The will of thousands it holds in stern subjection to a single mind, and keeps them in a state of bondage more galling to the soul than that of a Polish serf, a Turkish peasant, or a galley slave.

All history, all observation, confirm these statements. "It has been a generally received opinion," says Franklin, "that a military man is not to inquire whether a war be just or unjust; he is to execute his orders. All princes that are disposed to become tyrants, must probably approve of this opinion, and be willing to establish it; but is it not a dangerous one? On this principle," a principle essential to the war-system, "if the tyrant commands his army to attack and destroy not only an unoffending neighbor nation, but even his own subjects, his army is bound to obey. A negro slave in our colonies, being commanded by his master to rob or murder a neighbor, or do any other immoral act, may refuse, and the magistrate will protect him in his refusal. *The slavery of a soldier then is worse than that of a negro.*"*

War allows to its agents no real freedom of mind. Lord Wellington once said in a public debate, that no man of religious principle, of such scruples as would interfere with any deeds of atrocity and horror required in the trade of human butchery, should be a soldier; and two British officers, having conscientiously refused to take any part in certain Popish ceremonies which they deemed idolatrous, were tried by a court martial, and cashiered. They appealed to the King; and his organ, in confirming the sentence, observed that, "if religious principles were allowed to be

* Letter to Benj. Vaughan, 1785.

urged by individual officers as a plea for disobedience of orders, the discipline of the army would sustain an injury which might be dangerous to the state."

But the mental tyranny of war is not confined to soldiers; it extends more or less through the nation, and seeks to bring all its minds under the control of brute force, and brute courage. It is the coarsest, as well as the cruellest of all despotisms, and presents a startling contrast to our character as a civilized, Christian community. Here is the very genius of pagan barbarism lording it over Christendom itself; and, with all our pretensions to intelligence and piety, we very much resemble the ancient Egyptians bowing down to crocodiles and alligators. War is still the undisputed tyrant, the recognized demi-god of Christendom, with his creed of violence, his precepts of crime, and his logic of lead and steel. It treats man as a brute, and tramples his intellectual manhood in the dust.

Look at the influence of this custom on mind in civil and political matters. It forbids the predominance of intellect and knowledge in the affairs of state. Talent, intelligence and every kind of mental culture, it keeps in the lowest possible scale of estimation, and makes them mere handmaids to its selfish and savage purposes. Statesmen and philosophers, orators, and men of science and letters, it throws into the shade, or chains to its car, or crushes beneath its iron hoof. Bold and brawny hands, the qualities of a tiger or bull-dog, seize the reins of government, and monopolize the political power of the world.

On this point history is decisive. Warriors have ever been permitted to engross the government of mankind; and with a very few exceptions like Cæsar, you will find them, like Attila and Alaric, Cromwell and Suwarrow, Tamerlane, Jenghizkhan and Achilles, a species of human tigers, skilled in little else than the art of bloodshed, devastation and misery. An Alexander or Napoleon may occasionally take with them on their excursions a naturalist to collect curiosities, a historian to record their exploits, or a poet to sing their praises; but the mass of powerful and cultivated minds, the warrior brings into subserviency to his own aggrandizement, and keeps them in a state of debasing subjection. Cultivate the arts of peace, and talent, knowledge and wisdom will hold the reins of government; but let the people become warlike, and military chieftains would soon drive them all at the point of the bayonet. Review the history of Greece and Rome, of England under Cromwell, of France under Napoleon, of all the republics except our own in the New World; and you will find a superabundance of proof on this point.

In view of such facts, I stand amazed at the disposition of intellectual men in all past ages to eulogize war and warriors. Still more strange is the encouragement which statesmen lend to war; for they are thus cherishing a serpent that will one day wreath his folds around them, and strangle them to death. It is only in peace that their worth can be fully appreciated, or their merits duly rewarded; while in war, or amid the influences of the war-system, Pompey outpeers Cicero, Cromwell takes precedence of Milton, and the hero of New Orleans or Tippecanoe, with only a modicum of talent or knowledge, leaves the first minds of the land far behind them in the race of popularity and power.

ERASMUS.